Taj Mahal

The Taj Mahal is an ivory-white marble [mausoleum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mausoleum) on the south bank of the [Yamuna](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yamuna) river in the Indian city of [Agra](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agra). It was commissioned in 1632 by the [Mughal emperor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mughal_Empire), [Shah Jahan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shah_Jahan) (reigned from 1628 to 1658), to house the [tomb](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tomb) of his favorite wife, [Mumtaz Mahal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mumtaz_Mahal). The tomb is the centerpiece of a 17-hectare (42-acre)complex, which includes a [mosque](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mosque) and a guest house, and is set in formal gardens bounded on three sides by a [crenellated](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crenellated) wall.

Construction of the mausoleum was essentially completed in 1643 but work continued on other phases of the project for another 10 years. The Taj Mahal complex is believed to have been completed in its entirety in 1653 at a cost estimated at the time to be around 32 million [rupees](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rupee), which in 2015 would be approximately 52.8 billion rupees ([U.S. $](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_dollar)827 million). The construction project employed some 20,000 artisans under the guidance of a board of architects led by the court architect to the emperor, [Ustad Ahmad Lahauri](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ustad_Ahmad_Lahauri).

The Taj Mahal was designated as a [UNESCO](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UNESCO) [World Heritage Site](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Heritage_Site) in 1983 for being "the jewel of Muslim art in India and one of the universally admired masterpieces of the world's heritage". It is regarded by many as the best example of [Mughal architecture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mughal_architecture) and a symbol of India's rich history. The Taj Mahal attracts 7–8 million visitors a year. In 2007, it was declared a winner of the [New7Wonders of the World](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New7Wonders_of_the_World) (2000–2007) initiative.

History

The Taj Mahal was commissioned by [Shah Jahan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shah_Jahan) in 1631.

Shah Jahan was a member of the Mughal dynasty that ruled most of northern India from the early 16th to the mid 18th-century. After the death of his father, King Jahangir, in 1627, Shah Jahan emerged the victor of a bitter power struggle with his brothers, and crowned himself emperor at Agra in 1628.

At his side was Arjumand Banu Begum, better known as Mumtaz Mahal (“Chosen One of the Palace”), whom he married in 1612 and cherished as the favorite of his three queens.

In 1631, Mumtaz Mahal died after giving birth to the couple’s 14th child. The grieving Shah Jahan, known for commissioning a number of impressive structures throughout his reign, ordered the building of a magnificent mausoleum across the Yamuna River from his own royal palace at Agra.

Under Aurangzeb’s long rule (1658-1707), the Mughal empire reached the height of its strength. However, his militant Muslim policies, including the destruction of many Hindu temples and shrines, undermined the enduring strength of the empire and led to its demise by the mid-18th century.

Even as Mughal power crumbled, the Taj Mahal suffered from neglect and disrepair in the two centuries after Shah Jahan’s death. Near the turn of the 19th century, Lord Curzon, then British viceroy of India, ordered a major restoration of the mausoleum complex as part of a colonial effort to preserve India’s artistic and cultural heritage.

Today, some 3 million people a year (or around 45,000 a day during peak tourist season) visit the Taj Mahal.

Air pollution from nearby factories and automobiles poses a continual threat to the mausoleum’s gleaming white marble façade, and in 1998, India’s [Supreme Court](https://www.history.com/topics/supreme-court-facts) ordered a number of anti-pollution measures to protect the building from deterioration. Some factories were closed, while vehicular traffic was banned from the immediate vicinity of the complex.

Architecture

The Taj Mahal incorporates and expands on design traditions of [Persian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persian_architecture) and earlier [Mughal architecture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mughal_architecture). Specific inspiration came from successful [Timurid](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timurid_dynasty) and Mughal buildings including the [Gur-e Amir](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gur-e_Amir) (the tomb of Timur, progenitor of the Mughal dynasty, in [Samarkand](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samarkand)),[Humayun's Tomb](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humayun%27s_Tomb), [Itmad-Ud-Daulah's Tomb](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Itmad-Ud-Daulah%27s_Tomb) (sometimes called the Baby Taj), and Shah Jahan's own [Jama Masjid](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jama_Masjid,_Delhi) in [Delhi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delhi). While earlier Mughal buildings were primarily constructed of red [sandstone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sandstone), Shah Jahan promoted the use of white marble inlaid with [semi-precious stones](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semi-precious_stones). Buildings under his patronage reached new levels of refinement.

Tomb

The tomb is the central focus of the entire complex of the Taj Mahal. It is a large, white marble structure standing on a square [plinth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plinth) and consists of a symmetrical building with an [iwan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iwan) (an arch-shaped doorway) topped by a large dome and [finial](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Finial). Like most Mughal tombs, the basic elements are Persian in origin.

The base structure is a large multi-chambered cube with [chamfered](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chamfer) corners forming an unequal eight-sided structure that is approximately 55 metres (180 ft) on each of the four long sides. Each side of the iwan is framed with a huge [pishtaq](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pishtaq) or vaulted archway with two similarly shaped arched balconies stacked on either side. This motif of stacked pishtaqs is replicated on the chamfered corner areas, making the design completely symmetrical on all sides of the building. Four minarets frame the tomb, one at each corner of the plinth facing the chamfered corners. The main chamber houses the false [sarcophagi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarcophagi) of Mumtaz Mahal and Shah Jahan; the actual graves are at a lower level.

Exterior decorations

The exterior decorations of the Taj Mahal are among the finest in Mughal architecture. As the surface area changes, the decorations are refined proportionally. The decorative elements were created by applying paint, [stucco](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stucco), stone inlays or carvings. In line with the Islamic prohibition against the use of anthropomorphic forms, the decorative elements can be grouped into either [calligraphy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calligraphy), abstract forms or vegetative motifs. Throughout the complex are [passages](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sura) from the [Qur'an](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qur%27an) that comprise some of the decorative elements. Recent scholarship suggests that the passages were chosen by Amanat Khan.[[19]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taj_Mahal#cite_note-19)[[20]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taj_Mahal#cite_note-k100-20)

Abstract forms are used throughout, especially in the plinth, minarets, gateway, mosque, jawab and, to a lesser extent, on the surfaces of the tomb. The domes and vaults of the sandstone buildings are worked with [tracery](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tracery) of [incised painting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Incised_painting) to create elaborate geometric forms. [Herringbone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opus_spicatum) inlays define the space between many of the adjoining elements. White inlays are used in sandstone buildings, and dark or black inlays on the white marbles. Mortared areas of the marble buildings have been stained or painted in a contrasting colour which creates a complex array of geometric patterns. Floors and walkways use contrasting [tiles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tile) or blocks in [tessellation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tessellation) patterns.

Interior decoration

The interior chamber of the Taj Mahal reaches far beyond traditional decorative elements. The inlay work is not pietra dura, but a [lapidary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lapidary) of precious and semiprecious [gemstones](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gemstone).[[23]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taj_Mahal#cite_note-23) The inner chamber is an octagon with the design allowing for entry from each face, although only the door facing the garden to the south is used. The interior walls are about 25 metres (82 ft) high and are topped by a "false" interior dome decorated with a sun motif. Eight pishtaq arches define the space at ground level and, as with the exterior, each lower pishtaq is crowned by a second pishtaq about midway up the wall. The four central upper arches form balconies or viewing areas, and each balcony's exterior window has an intricate screen or [jali](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jali) cut from marble. In addition to the light from the balcony screens, light enters through roof openings covered by chattris at the corners. The octagonal marble screen or jali bordering the cenotaphs is made from eight marble panels carved through with intricate pierce work. The remaining surfaces are inlaid in delicate detail with semi-precious stones forming twining vines, fruits and flowers. Each chamber wall is highly decorated with dado bas-relief, intricate lapidary inlay and refined calligraphy panels which reflect, in miniature detail, the design elements seen throughout the exterior of the complex.

Garden

The complex is set around a large 300-metre (980 ft) square [charbagh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charbagh) or [Mughal garden](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mughal_gardens). The garden uses raised pathways that divide each of the four quarters of the garden into 16 sunken [parterres](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parterre) or flowerbeds. Halfway between the tomb and gateway in the centre of the garden is a raised marble water tank with a [reflecting pool](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reflecting_pool) positioned on a north-south axis to reflect the image of the mausoleum. The raised marble water tank is called al Hawd al-Kawthar in reference to the "Tank of Abundance" promised to [Muhammad](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad).

Most Mughal charbaghs are rectangular with a tomb or [pavilion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pavilion) in the centre. The Taj Mahal garden is unusual in that the main element, the tomb, is located at the end of the garden. With the discovery of [Mahtab Bagh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahtab_Bagh) or "Moonlight Garden" on the other side of the Yamuna, the interpretation of the [Archaeological Survey of India](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archaeological_Survey_of_India) is that the Yamuna river itself was incorporated into the garden's design and was meant to be seen as one of the rivers of Paradise. Similarities in layout and architectural features with [the Shalimar Gardens](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shalimar_Gardens_(Jammu_and_Kashmir)) suggests both gardens may have been designed by the same architect, Ali Mardan. Early accounts of the garden describe its profusion of vegetation, including abundant [roses](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rose), [daffodils](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daffodil), and [fruit trees](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fruit_tree).As the Mughal Empire declined, the Taj Mahal and its gardens also declined. By the end of the 19th century, the [British Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Empire) controlled more than three-fifths of India, and assumed management of the Taj Mahal. They changed the landscaping to their liking which more closely resembled the formal lawns of London.

Outlying buildings

The Taj Mahal complex is bordered on three sides by [crenellated](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crenellation) red sandstone walls; the side facing the river is open. Outside the walls are several additional mausoleums, including those of Shah Jahan's other [wives](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wives), and a larger tomb for Mumtaz's favourite servant.

The main gateway (darwaza) is a monumental structure built primarily of marble, and reminiscent of the Mughal architecture of earlier emperors. Its archways mirror the shape of the tomb's archways, and its pishtaq arches incorporate the calligraphy that decorates the tomb. The vaulted ceilings and walls have elaborate geometric designs like those found in the other sandstone buildings in the complex.

At the far end of the complex are two grand red sandstone buildings that mirror each other, and face the sides of the tomb. The backs of the buildings parallel the western and eastern walls. The western building is a mosque and the other is the jawab (answer), thought to have been constructed for architectural balance although it may have been used as a guesthouse. Distinctions between the two buildings include the jawab's lack of a [mihrab](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mihrab) (a niche in a mosque's wall facing Mecca), and its floors of geometric design whereas the floor of the mosque is laid with outlines of 569 prayer rugs in black marble. The mosque's basic design of a long hall surmounted by three domes is similar to others built by Shah Jahan, particularly the Masjid-i Jahān-Numā, or [Jama Masjid, Delhi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jama_Masjid,_Delhi). The Mughal mosques of this period divide the [sanctuary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanctuary) hall into three areas comprising a main sanctuary and slightly smaller sanctuaries on either side. At the Taj Mahal, each sanctuary opens onto an expansive vaulting dome. The outlying buildings were completed in 1643.

Construction

The Taj Mahal is built on a parcel of land to the south of the walled city of Agra. Shah Jahan presented Maharajah Jai Singh with a large palace in the centre of Agra in exchange for the land. An area of roughly 1.2 hectares (3 acres) was excavated, filled with dirt to reduce seepage, and levelled at 50 metres (160 ft) above riverbank. In the tomb area, wells were dug and filled with stone and rubble to form the [footings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foundation_(engineering)) of the tomb. Instead of lashed [bamboo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bamboo), workmen constructed a colossal brick scaffold that mirrored the tomb. The scaffold was so enormous that foremen estimated it would take years to dismantle.

The Taj Mahal was constructed using materials from all over India and Asia. It is believed over 1,000 elephants were used to transport building materials. The translucent white marble was brought from [Makrana](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Makrana), Rajasthan, the jasper from [Punjab](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Punjab_region), [jade](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jade) and [crystal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crystal) from China. The [turquoise](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turquoise) was from [Tibet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tibet) and the [Lapis lazuli](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lapis_lazuli) from [Afghanistan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghanistan), while the [sapphire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sapphire) came from [Sri Lanka](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri_Lanka) and the [carnelian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carnelian) from [Arabia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabia). In all, twenty-eight types of precious and semi-precious stones were inlaid into the white marble.

According to the legend, Shah Jahan decreed that anyone could keep the bricks taken from the scaffold, and thus it was dismantled by peasants overnight. A 15-kilometre (9.3 mi) tamped-earth ramp was built to transport marble and materials to the construction site and teams of twenty or thirty oxen pulled the blocks on specially constructed wagons. An elaborate [post-and-beam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post-and-beam) pulley system was used to raise the blocks into desired position. Water was drawn from the river by a series of purs, an animal-powered rope and bucket mechanism, into a large storage tank and raised to a large distribution tank. It was passed into three subsidiary tanks, from which it was piped to the complex.

The plinth and tomb took roughly 12 years to complete. The remaining parts of the complex took an additional 10 years and were completed in order of minarets, mosque and jawab, and gateway. Since the complex was built in stages, discrepancies exist in completion dates due to differing opinions on "completion". Construction of the mausoleum itself was essentially completed by 1643 while work continued on the outlying buildings continued for years. Estimates of the cost of construction vary due to difficulties in estimating costs across time. The total cost at the time has been estimated to be about 32 million Indian rupees, which is around 52.8 billion Indian rupees ($827 million US) based on 2015 values.

Tourism

The Taj Mahal attracts a large number of tourists. UNESCO documented more than 2 million visitors in 2001, which had increased to about 7–8 million in 2014. A two-tier pricing system is in place, with a significantly lower entrance fee for Indian citizens and a more expensive one for foreigners. Most tourists visit in the cooler months of October, November and February. Polluting traffic is not allowed near the complex and tourists must either walk from parking lots or catch an electric bus. The Khawasspuras (northern courtyards) are currently being restored for use as a new visitor centre.

The small town to the south of the Taj, known as Taj Ganji or Mumtazabad, was originally constructed with [caravanserais](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caravanserais), [bazaars](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bazaar) and markets to serve the needs of visitors and workmen. Lists of recommended travel destinations often feature the Taj Mahal, which also appears in several listings of [seven wonders](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_Wonders_of_the_World) of the modern world, including the recently announced [New Seven Wonders of the World](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Seven_Wonders_of_the_World), a recent poll with 100 million votes.

The grounds are open from 06:00 to 19:00 weekdays, except for Friday when the complex is open for prayers at the mosque between 12:00 and 14:00. The complex is open for night viewing on the day of the full moon and two days before and after, excluding Fridays and the month of [Ramadan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramadan). For security reasons only five items—water in transparent bottles, small video cameras, still cameras, mobile phones and small ladies' purses—are allowed inside the Taj Mahal.

Citation Information

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